

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o XXXIII.]

Saturday, Sept. 17. 1785.

I Mentioned in my last Paper, that my friend Colonel Caustic and I had accepted an invitation to dine with his neighbour Lord *Grubwell*. Of that dinner I am now to take the liberty of giving some account to my readers. It is one advantage of that habit of observation, which, as a thinking Lounger, I have acquired, that from most entertainments I can carry something more than the mere dinner away. I remember an old acquaintance of mine, a jolly carbuncle-faced fellow, who used to give an account of a company by the single circumstance of the liquor they could swallow. At such a dinner was one man of three bottles, four of two, six of a bottle and a half, and so on; and as for himself, he kept a sort of journal of what he had *pouched*, as he called it, at every place to which he had been invited during a whole winter. My reckoning is of another sort; I have sometimes carried off from a dinner, one, two, or three characters, swallowed half a dozen anecdotes, and tasted eight or ten insipid things, that were not worth the swallowing. I have one advantage over my old friend; I can digest what, in his phrase, I have *pouched*, without a headach.

When we sat down to dinner at Lord *Grubwell*'s, I found that the table was occupied in some sort by two different parties, one of which belonged to my Lord, and the other to my Lady. At the upper end of my Lord's, sat *Mr Placid*, a man agreeable by profession, who has no corner in his mind, no prominence in his feelings, and, like certain chymical liquors, has the property of coalescing with every thing. He dines with every body that gives a dinner, has seventeen cards for the seven days of the week, cuts up a fowl, tells a story, and hears a story told, with the best grace of any man in the world. *Mr Placid* had been brought by my Lord, but seemed inclined to desert to my Lady, or rather to side with both, having a smile on the right cheek for the one, and a fimper on the left for the other.

Lord *Grubwell* being a patron of the fine arts, had at his *board-end*, besides the layer out of his grounds, a discarded fidler from the opera-house, who allowed that *Handel* could compose a tolerable chorus; a painter, who had made what he called Fancy-portraits of all the family, who talked a great deal about *Correggio*; a gentleman on one hand of him, who seemed an adept in cookery; and a little blear-eyed man on the other, who was a connoisseur in wine. On horse-flesh, hunting, shooting, cricket, and cock-fighting, we had occasional dissertations from several young gentlemen at both sides of his end of the table, who, though not directly of his establishment, seemed, from what occurred in conversation, to be pretty constantly in waiting.

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Of my Lady's division the most conspicuous person was a gentleman who sat next her, Sir John —, who seemed to enjoy the office of her *Cicisbeo*, or *Cavaliere servente*, as nearly as the custom of this country allows. There was, however, one little difference between him and the Italian cavaliere, that he did not seem so solicitous to serve as to admire the Lady, the little attentions being rather directed from her to him. Even his admiration was rather understood than expressed. The gentleman, indeed, to borrow a phrase from the grammarians, appeared to be altogether of the passive mood, and to consider every exertion as vulgar and unbecoming. He spoke mincingly, looked something more delicate than man; had the finest teeth, the whitest hand, and sent a perfume around him at every motion. He had travelled, quoted Italy very often, and called this a *tramontane* country, in which, if it were not for one or two fine women, there would be no possibility of existing.

Besides this male attendant, Lady Grubwell had several female intimates, who seemed to have profited extremely by her patronage and instructions, who had learned to talk on all *town* subjects with such ease and confidence, that one could never have supposed they had been bred in the country, and had, as Colonel Caulfield informed me, only lost their bashfulness about three weeks before. One or two of them, I could see, were in a professed and particular manner imitators of my Lady, used all her phrases, aped all her gestures, and had their dress made so exactly after her pattern, that the Colonel told me, a blunt country-gentleman, who dined there one rainy day, and afterwards passed the night at his house, thought they had got wet to the skin in their way, and had been refitted from her Ladyship's wardrobe. "But he was mistaken," said the Colonel; "they only borrowed a little of her complexion."

The painter had made a picture, of which he was very proud, of my Lady, attended by a groupe of those young friends, in the character of *Diana*, surrounded by her nymphs, surprised by *Acteon*. My Lady, when she was shewing it to me, made me take notice how very like my Lord Acteon was. Sir John, who leaned over her shoulder, put on as broad a smile as his good breeding would allow, and said it was one of the most monstrous clever things he had ever heard her Ladyship say.

Of my Lord's party there were some young men, brothers and cousins of my Lady's nymphs, who shewed the same laudable desire of imitating him, as their kinswomen did of copying her. But each end of the table made now and then interchanges with the other: some of the most promising of my Lord's followers were favoured with the countenance and regard of her Ladyship; while, on the other hand, some of her nymphs drew the particular attention of Acteon, and seemed, like those in the picture, willing to hide his Diana from him. Amidst those different, combined, or mingled parties, I could not help admiring the dexterity of *Placid*, who contrived to divide himself among them with wonderful address. To the landscape-gardener he talked of *clumps* and

and *jewells*; he spoke of harmony to the musician, of colouring to the painter, of hats and feathers to the young ladies, and even conciliated the elevated and unbending Baronet, by appeals to him about the key at *Marseilles*, the *Corso* at *Rome*, and the gallery of *Florence*. He was once only a little unfortunate in a reference to Colonel Caustic, which he meant as a compliment to my Lady, "how much more elegant the dress of the Ladies was now-a-days than formerly when they remembered it?" Placid is but very little turned of fifty.

Caustic and I were nearly "mutes and audience to this act." The Colonel indeed now and then threw in a word or two of that *dolce piceante*, that sweet and sharp sort in which his politeness contrives to convey his satire. I thought I could discover that the company stood somewhat in awe of him; and even my Lady endeavoured to gain his good-will by a very marked attention. She begged leave to drink his sister's health in a particular manner after dinner, and regretted exceedingly not being favoured with her company. "She hardly ever stirs abroad, my Lady," answered the Colonel, "besides (looking slyly at some of her Ladyship's female friends) she is not young, nor, I am afraid, bashful enough for one of Diana's virgins."

When we returned home in the evening, Caustic began to moralise on the scene of the day. "We were talking," said he to me, "tother morning, when you took up a volume of *Cook's Voyages*, of the advantages and disadvantages arising to newly-discovered countries from our communication with them; of the wants we shew them along with the conveniencies of life, the diseases we communicate along with the arts we teach. I can trace a striking analogy between this and the visit of Lord and Lady Grubwell to the savages here, as I am told they often call us. Instead of the plain wholesome fare, the sober manners, the filial, the parental, the family-virtues, which some of our households possessed, these great people will inoculate extravagance, dissipation, and neglect of every relative duty; and then, in point of breeding and behaviour, we shall have petulance and inattention, instead of bashful civility, because it is the fashion with fine folks to be *easy*; and rusticity shall be set off with impudence, like a grogram waistcoat with tinsel binding, that only makes its coarseness more disgusting."

"But you must put them right, my good Sir," I replied, "in these particulars. You must tell your neighbours, who may be apt, from some spurious example, to suppose that every thing contrary to the natural ideas of politeness is polite, that in such an opinion they are perfectly mistaken. Such a caricature is indeed, as in all other imitations, the easiest to be imitated; but it is not the real portraiture and likeness of a high-bred man or woman. As good dancing is like a more dignified sort of walk, and as the best dress hangs the easiest on the shape; so the highest good breeding, and the most highly-polished fashion is the nearest to nature, but to nature in its best state, to that *belle nature* which works of taste (and a person of fashion is a work of taste) in every department require. It is the same
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" in morals as in demeanor; a real man of fashion has a certain *retenue*, a degree of moderation in every thing, and will not be more wicked or dissipated than there is occasion for; you must therefore signify to that young man who sat near me at Lord Grubwell's, who swore immoderately, was rude to the chaplain, and told us some things of himself for which he ought to have been hanged, that he will not have the honour of going to the devil in the very best company."

" Were I to turn preacher," answered the Colonel, " I would not read your homily. It might be as you say in former times; but in my late excursion to your city, I cannot say I could discover, even in the first company, the high polish you talk of. There was nature, indeed, such as one may suppose her in places which I have long since forgotten; but as for her beauty or grace, I could perceive but little of it. The world has been often called a *theatre*; now the theatre of your fashionable world seems to me to have lost the best part of its audience; it is all either the yawn of the side-boxes, or the roar of the upper gallery. There is no *pit*, (as I remember the pit); none of that mixture of good breeding, discernment, taste, and feeling, which constitutes an audience, such as a first-rate performer would wish to act his part to. For the simile of the theatre will still hold in this further particular, that a man, to be perfectly well bred, must have a certain respect and value for his audience, otherwise his exertions will generally be either coarse or feeble. Though indeed a perfectly-well bred man will feel that respect even for himself; and were he in a room alone," said Caustic, (taking an involuntary step or two, till he got opposite to a mirror that hangs at the upper end of his parlour), " would blush to find himself in a mean or ungraceful attitude, or to indulge a thought gross, illiberal, or ungentlemanlike." " You smile," said Miss Caustic to me; " but I have often told my brother, that he is a very *Oroondates* on that score; and your Edinburgh people may be very well bred, without coming up to his standard." " Nay but," said I, " were I even to give Edinburgh up, it would not affect my position. Edinburgh is but a copy of a larger metropolis; and in every copy the defect I mentioned is apt to take place: and of all qualities I know, this of fashion and good breeding is the most delicate, the most evanescent, if I may be allowed so pedantic a phrase. 'Tis like the flavour of certain liquors, which it is hardly possible to preserve in the removal of them." " Oh! now I understand you," said Caustic, smiling in his turn; " like *Harrowgate-water*, for example, which I am told has spirit at the spring; but when brought hither, I find it, under favour, to have nothing but stink and ill taste remaining."

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